

**REMARKS FOR
THE HONORABLE NORMAN Y. MINETA
SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION**

**ORAL STATEMENT BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON HIGHWAYS,
TRANSIT AND PIPELINES
COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION
AND INFRASTRUCTURE
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**REAUTHORIZATION OF
SURFACE TRANSPORTATION PROGRAMS**

**May 15, 2003
2:00 PM**

Chairman Petri, Congressman Lipinski, Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss the Administration's proposal to reauthorize our surface transportation programs.

As you know, I am happy to report that yesterday I sent to Congress the Administration's reauthorization proposal, the Safe, Accountable, Flexible and Efficient Transportation Equity Act of 2003, or "SAFETEA."

This six-year, \$247 billion proposal is the largest surface and public transportation commitment in American history. It builds on the successes of the landmark legislation, ISTEA, which I co-authored during my days on the other side of this microphone, and its predecessor, TEA-21.

I believe this reauthorization proposal serves as a true blueprint for investment in our future, supplying the funds and the framework for investments needed to maintain and grow our vital transportation infrastructure.

In addition, our proposed legislation places a central focus on transportation safety. Although we have made improvements in the rates of fatalities and injuries on our highways, the total numbers remain intolerable, and they are rising. In 2002, nearly 43,000 people lost their lives on our highways and roads. These are numbers that I simply will not accept.

That is why I have challenged the dedicated men and women of the Department of Transportation to dramatically reduce the number of injuries and fatalities on our nations highways, starting right now.

For the past year and a half, this Department, with the critical and timely help of this Committee, has dedicated itself to improving transportation security for Americans. Faced with the scourge of terrorism, our Department responded by creating unprecedented partnerships with the private sector, Congress, interest groups, and Federal, State, and local agencies. Together we succeeded in decreasing the dangers of terrorism through new and better technology, more personnel, improved laws, and increased education.

Mr. Chairman, we are going to do the same thing with car crashes. This year, we are going to take the same passion, call on similar partnerships, and build the same record of success through enforcement, education, and engineering.

Nothing would make a greater difference in highway reducing injuries and fatalities than to increase the use of safety belts everywhere in America. If safety belt use were to increase from the national average of 75 percent to 90 percent -- an achievable goal -- 4,000 lives would be saved each year.

We have a moral, as well as an economic, obligation to immediately address the problem of transportation safety. The total economic impact of all motor vehicle crashes exceeds \$230 billion a year, a staggering figure. That is why the President and I have made saving lives an essential priority for the Department and for the reauthorization of TEA-21.

Our bill would improve safety by creating a new core safety program, consolidating and simplifying the safety programs administered by NHTSA, and providing new incentive bonuses to reward States that achieve demonstrable safety results.

Enactment of this bill would be an important step in reducing highway fatalities and injuries, and providing greater flexibility to State and local governments.

Our Nation's transportation system faces significant challenges in other areas as well, such as congestion, project delivery, freight movement and intermodal connectivity. SAFETEA would create a safer, simpler, and smarter Federal surface transportation program by addressing transportation problems of national significance, while giving State and local transportation decision makers more flexibility to solve transportation problems in their communities.

To accomplish all of these goals, SAFETEA calls for a record Federal investment in surface transportation, spending over \$201 billion on highway and safety programs, and nearly \$46 billion on public transportation programs, from fiscal year 2004 through fiscal year 2009.

I firmly believe that our proposal provides an excellent framework to tackle the surface transportation challenges that lie ahead.

SAFETEA will help ensure needed repairs to our roads and bridges. It will ensure that new transportation projects are completed on budget and on time, while protecting the environment. And it ensures the continued growth of our Nation's economy, without imposing costly new taxes.

Our proposal funds our nation's transportation infrastructure needs in a fiscally responsible manner. SAFETEA continues the funding guarantees of TEA-21 that linked highway funding with transportation excise tax receipts, and redirects the 2.5 cents per gallon of the General Fund's gasohol tax to the Highway Trust Fund.

SAFETEA also improves highway infrastructure performance and maintenance by dedicating an additional \$1 billion a year of Highway Trust Fund dollars over and above each year's estimated receipts into the Highway Trust Fund.

Obviously, the total size of the program is and will continue to be a matter of debate. That debate should not, however, be permitted to cloud a meaningful and necessary discussion of the many programmatic reforms contained in SAFETEA.

Moreover, any proposal that jettisons the important linkage between tax revenues and spending in an effort to achieve higher overall funding puts the landmark victory of guaranteed funding at risk.

My written statement, which has been submitted for the record, contains a much more detailed explanation of the programmatic reforms that are included in our SAFETEA proposal. I hope that you will give these proposals serious consideration as the committee moves to develop its version of this legislation.

I would like to conclude by stressing the fact that the Bush Administration is committed to securing approval of a multi-year reauthorization bill this year, and I look forward to working with Congress to achieve that very important goal. Thank you very much for having me here today, and I look forward to answering your questions.

###